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ABSTRACT

Andhra Pradesh Open University (APOU), the first university in India modeled on the British Open University, provides opportunities for higher education through the use of multimedia systems to supplement correspondence education; offers equality of educational opportunities; allows flexibility with regard to eligibility for enrollment; complements the programs of existing universities; promotes integration within the state; offers degree courses and non-degree certificates; and offers opportunities for research and the dissemination of knowledge. This description of APOU provides information on: (1) academic programs, which include undergraduate programs in Arts/Commerce/Science, postgraduate diplomas in Public Accounting, Public Relations, Bachelor of Library and Information Sciences, Certificate Programme in Food and Nutrition, and research programs leading to doctoral degrees in Development Studies; (2) organizational structure, i.e., it is centered in the state capital with a network of 60 study centers throughout the state; (3) student support services, i.e., support for lessons, which are in a self-instructional format, are provided by library, audiovisual, and laboratory services at the study centers; (4) face-to-face components, i.e., the contact-cum-counselling classes for students; and (5) the distance factor in face-to-face communication, which is accommodated by use of the study centers as a base where students, tutors, and counselors can come together. (Contains 8 references.) (ALF)

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DISTANCE AS A FACTOR IN FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION : A CASE OF ANDHRA PRADESH OPEN UNIVERSITY

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The formal system of education is a highly structured and rigid model.It imposes several restrictions not only on the educational aspirant but also on the process of education itself.Such as

1.It is an activity to be pursued when a person is young;

2.It has to be pursued on a full-time basis;

3.Teaching is done by a teacher on a full-time basis; and

4.Teaching takes place in the classroom and the student has to go to the place where it is located (Reddy,1987:39).

A state has now been reached when even the most affluent countries are convinced that they will not be able to provide adequate education to people unless they abandon their exclusive dependence on formal system of education (Naik, 1978:9).

Search for alternatives temporarily halted with correspondence education. Correspondence education, as we know it, has been in existence for over 150 years and rudimentary forms may reach back hundreds of years (Holmberg, 1986). Correspondence education could be taken to mean 'education by correspondence'. The educational transaction in this method is facilitated by the medium of print in conjunction with the mail system. As a result, this method affords the learner considerable independence with regard to both place and time of study. For many students, correspondence education has broken down these two previously insurmountable barriers to continuing education (Garrison, 1989:55)

Non-utilisation of the available technological media for instructional purposes and sole reliance on print medium is a serious limitation of

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correspondence education. To erase the feeling of'isolation'from the minds of students and to arouse and maintain their motivation, it is necessary to have a 'dialogue'.

Though correspondence education became quite prevalent, according to Garrison (1989), what appeared to be lacking were imaginative methods of facilitating mediated communication between teacher and student (p.57). To overcome this limitation, in the early seventies, correspondence education added radio and television broadcasts and audio cassettes to the course materials developed by a team of experts. The catalyst for these innovations was the establishment of the British Open University (Garrison, 1989:57)

According to Perry (1977), the Open University concept was the key to providing opportunities for higher education 'through a multi-media system that harnessed educational broadcasting to correspondence teaching and other methods'(p.9).The Open Learning system was able to take the student out of isolation with the imaginative usage of teaching media. To date there are over twenty five universities around the world modeled upon the British Open University. The Andhra Pradesh Open University (APOU) is the first university to be started on these lines in India. In its eight years of existence it has provided educational opportunities to over 1.4 lakh students. The APOU is working under the following set-up:

Andhra Pradesh - A Profile:

Geography: Andhra Pradesh is one of the 27 States of India, formed in 1956. It has an area of 275,068 square kilometers and is the fifth largest in the country. The state has been divided into three regions - Telangana, the Coastal area and Rayalaseema. There are two kinds of climatic conditions. The whole of Telangana and the Coastal area receive heavy rainfall; in other areas of the state hot steppe type conditions prevail.

Population: According to the 1991 (Provisional) census the population of the state is 66,304,854 representing 7.85 per cent of the country's population. In terms of density there are 241 persons per square kilometer. Telugu is the dominant language. Urdu, Hindi, Marathi, Kannada, Tamil, Malayalam,Oriya are also spoken in this state.

Economy: Agriculture is the main occupation of the state, with more than 17.46 per cent of the working population in agricultural enterprises. The state is regarded as the 'Annapurna' or 'Rice bowl' of India.

Literacy rate: About 45.11 per cent of the state population (aged 7 years and above) overall is literate, with males at 56.24 per cent and females 33.71 per cent.

There are 401 Degree level colleges under the jurisdiction of 13 conventional universities. The enrollment of students in non-professional Undergraduate Programmes in the conventional universities stood at 3,04,700 during 1987-88.

The Andhra Pradesh Open University:

The APOU came into existence with the following objectives:

a. to provide educational opportunities to those students who could not take advantage of institutions of higher learning;

b.to realise equality of educational opportunities of higher education for a large segment of the population including those in employment, women including house-wives and adults, who wish to upgrade their education or acquire knowledge and studies in various fields through distance education;

c. to provide flexibility with regard to eligibility for enrollment,age of entry, choice of courses, methods of learning, conduct of examinations and operation of the programmes;

d. complementary to the programmes of the existing universi ties in the state in the field of higher learning so as to maintain the highest standards on par with the best univer sities in the country;

e. to promote integration within the state through its policies and programmes;

f. to offer degree courses and non-degree certificate courses for the benefit of working population in various fields and for the benefit of those who wish to enrich their lives by studying subjects of cultural and aesthetic values;

g. to make provision for research and for the advancement and dissemination of knowledge.

Academic Programmes:

The Andhra Pradesh Open University offers the following Degree / Diploma / Certificate courses:

The general undergraduate (UG) Programme leads to a Bachelor's degree in Arts/Commerce/Science. This 3 year duration programme has been launched in 1983.

The University has been offering a Postgraduate Diploma in Public Accounting (PGDPA) of one year's duration to train candidates who are working or who seek employment as Accountants/Auditors in government departments or public undertakings, from the academic year 1984-85.

Another Postgraduate Diploma, in Public Relations (PGDPR) was introduced by the University in the academic year 1985-86. This one year diploma was started with the objectives - to enable the students to get acquainted with the basic principles of Public Relations, Communication, Advertising, Journalism, etc.; to train the students in the techniques of

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Public Relations for pursuing a career in Public Relations and discharging their duties as Public Relations Managers efficiently; and, to observe the functioning of Public Relations department and media establishments like News Papers, Radio,Doordarshan etc, to gain an insight of practical Public Relations and use of media in promoting organisations which they represent.

Bachelor of Library and Information Sciences (BLISc) Programme has been launched during the academic year 1985-86, to impart instruction to those persons who are working in libraries and are keen on improving their professional qualifications.

A Certificate Programme in Food and Nutrition (CPFN) has been launched by the University in 1989. This is an awareness course of six months duration.

In addition to the conventional and specialised courses of study, the University in collaboration with Centre for Economic and Social Studies started research programmes leading to M.Phil. and Ph.D. degrees in Development Studies.

Organisation Structure:

The Andhra Pradesh Open University functions from its headquarters at Hyderabad, the state capital city, and a network of 60 study centres spread throughout the state. The work at the headquarters is divided among various branches/directorates, viz., the Academic, Student Services, Material Production, Evaluation, Administration and Examinations.

The Study Centres are contact points between the University and the students. They organise the contact-cum-counselling classes and provide audio-visual support. They also have small libraries without book lending facility. Most of the study centres are housed in the premises of conven-

tional colleges. Study Centres are headed by Coordinators, who provide academic and non-academic guidance and counseling to the students. The faculty members of the study centres, who are known as counsel, hold contact-cum-counselling classes for the students.

The University provides educational opportunities to the learners through its study centres throughout the state. The rationale in the location of study centres it appears, is demand from the learners, availability of resource persons, and infra-structural facilities. Broadly speaking, there is one study centre in each district headquarters and also in important towns of the district. Altogether there are 60 study centres of which 14 are located within the capital city of Hyderabad alone. The concentration of large number of study centres in Hyderabad may be justified on the ground that around 32% of the learners are supplied from this catchment area (Narasaiah & Mouli, 1991:46)

Student Support Services:

Though the University adapted multimedia approach to instruction, print is the dominant medium. Printed course material, in a self-instructional format, is produced by the university and provided to the students. Lessons are broadcast over All India Radio. Students can make use of the audio-visual services ailable at the study centres. Library corners of study centres provide reading facilities to the students. Laboratory facilities are made available at the study centres for those students who opted science subjects. In addition to these student support services, the students are provided with an opportunity to have face-to-face contact with their counsellors to receive academic counseling.

Face-to-face components:

An important component of face-to-face communication at the Andhra

Pradesh Open University are the Contact-cum-Counselling Classes(CCCs) held on Sunday's and holidays. There are variations in the number of CCCs from one programme to another. First year Undergraduate students (Foundation Courses) have CCCs on 21 days of 8 hours duration amounting to 42 hours per subject. Whereas, the Undergraduate students of II and III Years have 24 CCCs of 2 hours duration each per subject i.e., for 48 hours. Students of PGDPA have 24 hours of counseling per subject, where as, PGDPR students have CCCs for 16 hours per subject. BLISc students have 16 hours of counseling for theory and 24 hours of counseling for practical courses. In CPFN the students have 15 hours of counseling.

Attending the CCCs is not compulsory in any of the programmes. Also, the attendance at the CCCs is not recorded. It is observed that less than 25% of the students attend these CCCs. However, there are variations according to the programmes. Attendance is more in case of Foundation courses, PGDPR and BLISc over others. The reason might be that the first year UG students, who are exposed to the mode of distance education for the first time, might be curious to know about and learn by this method. The other two, PGDPR and BLISc, are professional courses that involve technical work may be demanding supervised study.

Yet another face-to-face component in distance education in the APOU is the conduct of Summer Schools. These are intensive coaching programmes, held towards the end of the academic year, just before the examinations. Summer Schools are conducted for the benefit of students of first year UG, PGDPA, PGDPR and BLISc programmes. Eight hours is devoted to each course of UG programme and six hours for each course of other programmes. Attending the Summer Schools is an option in all programmes,except BLISc, where it is compulsory to attend. It is observed that there is no improvement over CCCs in attendance at Summer Schools. Though it is compulsory to

attend, BLISc summer schools are attended by just, over 60 per cent of the students.

For the benefit of students who opted to study subjects in Sciences, practical classes are conducted at their study centres. They are held for 18 days(36 hours per subject). Though attending these practicals is compulsory, the percentage of attendance is only 80%.

The CCCs for students of UG programme are held at all the 60 study centres, with certain variations in the number of subjects. All the 18 subjects are offered only at 25 study centres, in both media, i.e., Telugu (Regional Language) and English. In 20 study centres located outside Hyderabad only 5 social science subjects, in Telugu Medium, are offered. In Hyderabad study centres there a number of variations with regard to the number of subjects of UG programme. Similarly, PGDPA is offered at 8 study centres, PGDPR at 6 study centres and BLISc at 4 study centres only.

Distance factor in Face-to-face communication :

The study centre has been used for a number of functions in various distance teaching systems. In some it has been seen as a viewing centre where replay devices may be used. In others it has been seen as a library resource centre. In some it has been seen as a focus for student interaction and self-help groups, a substitute for the conventional campus. In yet others it has been offered as a site for practical experiments or the use of equipment, such as computing facilities, which are essential to study but which cannot be offered easily to the student at home. Finally, there are cases where study centres are valued as a tangible link between the otherwise impersonal distance teaching institution and the local community (Sewart, 1987:34)

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In order to visit such an important place, it is observed that an UG student residing at Hyderabad has to cover a distance of nearly 10-20 kilometers, both ways. Whereas, an UG student who hails from other places of the state will have to travel a distance of over 50 kilometers to receive counseling. Because of the course offerings at selected study centres, students of PGDPR, PGDPA, BLISc and CPFN Programmes some times have to travel a distance of more than 300 kilometers to visit the study centre. This task involves not only expenditure of energy but also money. Because of which, a student is made to think twice before he decides to go to his study centre.

The study centre is 'a **base** where students can come together and meet their tutors, counselors and other students'(Tomlinson, 1984:195). A student gets an opportunity to go to his study centre and attend the CCCs to get his doubts clarified, at most, only once in a week. Equally important is his social interaction with the peer group. Not being able to meet the expenditure and also not being prepared to lose the rare opportunity, the student is always in a dilemma- to attend or not to?

Thus, it may be inferred that the physical distance a student has to cover in order to reach his study centre is acting as a 'demotivating factor' keeping him away from his CCCs. Indirectly, it is generating 'social and psychological' distance between the teacher and the taught; and also among the distance learners. How can we enable the distant learner to attend the study centre over coming the barrier of distance? It is unjust to ask him to move to a place closer to his study centre. Because, any one would prefer to be nearer his workplace, which he attends regularly, than a study centre that he visits less often.

A solution to the problem of 'distance' would be to start a number of

study centres. Then they will be easily accessible to the student community. It is estimated that starting of a new study centre involves a non-recurring expenditure of Rupees 2,24,250. Besides the monetary aspect, for the establishment of a study centre, it needs infrastructure facilities and qualified trained personnel to conduct CCCs. Above all, the demand from the general public seeking education should be taken into consideration. Otherwise, it would be uneconomical for the University to start a study centre. May be, in view of the afore mentioned reasons the APOU is unable to start many more study centres.

A viable alternative solution to the problem of 'distance' would be to 'strengthen the two-way communication process' that is capable enough to overcome the barrier of 'distance. In open learning system,assignments form the one and the only mode of interaction especially when there are no counseling sessions. Presently an undergraduate student of APOU has to submit 3 assignments to be eligible to appear for terminal examinations. However, no weightage is given to these assignments in the final award of marks.

The policy of submission of assignments should be strictly implemented. On the other hand measures should be taken to press technological channels into service. The telephone offers a form of personal contact. It can be used effectively to link an individual student to a local tutor or counselor, or to a representative of the system at the course providing centre .....These personal communications are fruitful(Mac Kenzie, 1975:44).

The loss caused due to the distance factor in face-to-face communication, if not really overcome, can be compensated to a great extent by strengthening the two-way communication process.

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